

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 CAIRO 00035 021622Z

44

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CU-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07

L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AID-05 COME-00 EB-07 FRB-01 TRSE-00 XMB-02

OPIC-03 CIEP-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 OMB-01 SCCT-01 SAB-01

SCS-03 SCA-01 OCE-00 CCO-00 NIC-01 /088 W

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FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1146

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT EG

SUBJECT: NEW YEAR'S DAY RIOTS

REF: CAIRO 0001

SUMMARY: MAXIMUM OF 2-3,000 RIOTERS, CAUSED SOME PROPERTY DAMAGE IN YESTERDAY'S DEMONSTRATION IN FAVOR LOWER PRICES AND HIGHER WAGES. LEFTIST PROVOCATEURS PROBABLY TOOK ADVANTAGE OF ALREADY EDGY PUBLIC MOOD TO SPUR ON RIOTING WORKERS AND STUDENTS. HEGAZI TOOK BRUNT OF VOCAL ABUSE, BUT IS NOT LIKELY TO LOSE HIS JOB IN NEAR FUTURE. SITUATION IS NOW QUIET, BUT REMAINS POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE. END SUMMARY.

1. HIGHER ECONOMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE, A CABINET SUB-COMMITTEE, HAS ISSUED A STATEMENT ON CAIRO RIOTS, GIVING FOLLOWING STATISTICS AND FACTS: 48 ARRESTS, 19 GLASS STORE FRONTS SMASHED, 15 PRIVATE CARS AND 26 BUSES DESTROYED. STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED INCIDENT TO ACTIVITY OF IRRESPONSIBLE ELEMENTS WHO INFILTRATED WORKERS AT BAB AL-LUK TRAIN STATION, OBSTRUCTED MOVEMENTS OF TRAINS, AND THEN MOVED INTO CITY PROPER CALLING ON BYSTANDERS TO JOIN THEM. PEOPLE, HOWEVER, "DID NOT RESPOND". TWO CIVILIANS

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 CAIRO 00035 021622Z

AND NUMBER OF POLICE WERE INJURED. DEPMILGOV (WHO IS MININT

SALIM) ALSO ISSUED STATEMENT CARRIED BY PRESS WARNING THAT LAW WILL BE APPLIED IN ANY CASE OF ILLEGAL DEMONSTRATION.

3. COMMENT: OUR READING OF INCIDENT ACCORDS WITH CABINET COMMITTEE STATEMENT. AT ITS PEAK, DEMONSTRATION DID NOT EXCEED FEW THOUSAND IN NUMBER, AND PERHAPS LESS THAN 2,000. SMALLER GANGS OF 25-30 ROCK-THROWING YOUTHS DID SCATTER THROUGHOUT DOWN-TOWN AREA THROWING STONES AND CHANTING. APPARENTLY THERE WAS SOME SHOUTING AGAINST SADAT, BUT NOT VERY MUCH. MOST SLOGANEERING WAS DIRECTED AGAINST HEGAZI, WHOSE REGIME WAS ALLEGED, IN CATCHY RHYMED COUPLET, TO BE WORSE THAN NAZI RULE. POLICE WERE ON SCENE DOUBLE QUICK AND DID EXCELLENT JOB SEALING OFF TROUBLE AREA. TOUGH CENTRAL SECURITY RESERVE WERE NOT CALLED OUT; TASK WAS LEFT TO REGULAR CENTRAL SECURITY POLICE FORCES WHO DID CREDITABLE JOB IN CONTAINING AND CONTROLLING CROWD WITHOUT BREAKING TOO MANY HEADS.

4. DESPITE DISCLAIMERS FROM ASHRAF MARWAN AND DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE CHIEF, WE BELIEVE IT LIKELY THAT MARXIST AGITATORS DID PLAY ROLE IN STIRRING UP CROWD. APPARENTLY, MANY WORKERS HAD BOARDED TRAIN TO HELWAN BUT TRAIN DEPARTURE WAS LONG DELAYED, PERHAPS DUE TO MECHANICAL FAILURE. WITH TEMPERS SHORT HERE DUE TO REAL DISTRESS CAUSED BY HIGH PRICES AND LOW WAGES, KINDLING POINT FOR DEMONSTRATION WAS PREDICTABLY LOW. HOWEVER, DEMONSTRATION MIGHT WELL HAVE OCCURRED WITHOUT PRESENCE PROVOCATEURS, AS OCCURRED LAST AUGUST WHEN TRAM WAS LATE AT MAJOR CAIRO STATION.

5. AMERICAN PROPERTY EMERGED UNSCATCHED FROM RIOTING, WITH EXCEPTION 25 BROKEN PLATE GLASS WINDOWS AT AUC, WHICH IS NEAR TAHRRIR SQUARE THE FOCAL POINT OF DEMO. AMERICAN VISITORS TELL US THAT LOCAL SHOPKEEPERS, AS THEY PULLED DOWN THEIR IRON SHUTTERS, COUNSELED PASSING TOURISTS IN FRIENDLY MANNER THAT THEY SHOULD GET OFF THE STREETS. NO ANTI-AMERICAN SLOGANEERING BY RIOTERS HAS BEEN REPORTED TO US, AND WE BELIEVE DEMONSTRATION WAS FOR SOLE PURPOSE OF COMPLAINING ABOUT DOMESTIC PROBLEMS, NOT FOREIGN ONES. NEVERTHELESS, AS REPORTED REFTEL, CANCELLATION OF BREZHNEV VISIT MIGHT HAVE HAD SOME TRIGGERING EFFECT.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 CAIRO 00035 021622Z

6. HEGAZI APPEARED ON TV LAST NIGHT PROJECTING ARA OF CALM AND CONFIDENCE. AS WE REPORTED AT TIME OF HIS APPOINTMENT AS PRIMIN LAST SEPTEMBER, HE IS WIDELY SEEN AS STRAW MAN SEP UP BY SADAT TO BE RELIEVED OF HIS DUTIES AT SOME FUTURE DATE BECAUSE OF FAILURE TO SOLVE VIRTUALLY INSOLUBLE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS. WE DO NOT BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT SADAT WOULD DEMONSTRATE SERVILE RESPONSE TO PUBLIC VIOLENCE BY FIRING HEGAZI RIGHT NOW, IMMEDIATELY AFTER MOB HAS SO DEMANDED. SOME LESSER CABINET CHANGES MAY BE IN WIND,

HOWEVER, AND HEGAZI'S LONG-TERM GRIP ON THE JOB IS TENOUS INDEED.

7. AS OF NOW, ALTHOUGH CAIRO IS QUIET, NO ONE WILL BE SURPRISED IF MORE TROUBLE STARTS SOON. SINCE OUTBREAK AT PORT SAID DEC 22, SEVERAL POTENTIALLY UGLY SITUATIONS HAVE DEVELOPED. FUNERAL OF FARID AL-ATRASH HAD TO BE CANCELLED LAST SUNDAY WHEN THOUSANDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE (PRESUMABLY TOO YOUNG TO BE FANS OF THIS LATE MIDDLE-AGED SINGER) MADE MOVEMENT THROUGH STREETS IN FRONT OF MOSQUE IMPOSSIBLE FOR SOME TWO HOURS. ON TUESDAY, PEACEFUL MEETING AT CAIRO UNIVERSITY HELD TO DISCUSS ALLEGED ADMINISTRATIVE INJUSTICES BY SCHOOL AUTHORITIES ALSO INCLUDED SPEAKERS WHOSE FLORID RHETORIC ON DOMESTIC ECONOMY WAS CLEARLY PROVOCATIVE ("SADAT'S DOG EATS MEAT WHILE WE STARVE"). ALSO ON TUESDAY, 400 GOE EMPLOYEES REPORTEDLY PETITIONED CABINET IN PERSON TO REVISE THE NEW DRAFT EMPLOYMENT LAW WHICH SPECIFIES PROMOTION WILL BE BY SELECTION, NOT SENIORITY. FURTHER, THERE HAVE BEEN RUMBLINGS OF TROUBLE ALL WEEK AT HELWAN WHERE LABOR UNIONS ARE BEATING THE DRUMS FOR HIGHER WAGES. FINALLY, THERE WAS LARGE AND NOISY, THOUGH APPARENTLY GOOD-NATURED, DEMONSTATION THIS MORNING AT AIN SHAMS STUDENTS CHANTING SOLGAN, RE SOLIDARITY WITH WORKERS. UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION THIS MORNING REMOVED POSTERS DENOUNCING "WHOLESALE ARRESTS" DURING RIOTS YESTERDAY.

9. LOCAL PRESS COVERAGE OF INCIDENT WAS BROAD, INCLUDING FRONT PAGE PICTURES. NEVERTHELESS, AMERICAN JOURNALISTS REPORT THEIR FILMS HAVE BEEN CONFISCATED. UPI FILM WAS SEIZED AT AIRPORT AND CBS PHOTOGRAPHER HAD TO GIVE UP FILM TO POLICE DURING RIOT.

10. WE UNDERSTAND GOE WILL FROM NOW ON CRACK DOWN HARD ON DEMONSTRATORS AND MOVE AGAINST COMMUNIST ACTIVITY.

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